

ATHENS' PRODUCT RECOMMENDATIONS FOR DISPOSABLE FOOD SERVING-WARE

Athens Services provides the following recommendations regarding **disposable food serving-ware** as a means to enhance our ability to recycle or compost discarded items, thus diverting material from landfills and reducing greenhouse gas emissions. (These recommendations are based on overall recycling and compost markets and technology capabilities as of 4/1/2025.)

BEWARE OF GREENWASHING. The Federal Trade Commission has Green Guidelines to ensure environmental claims are not misleading, including standardizing the marketing use of “compostable,” “biodegradable,” and “recyclable.” Please visit [FTC Green Guidelines](#) for more information and resources.

CONSIDER REUSABLES FIRST. Athens encourages the use of reusable food serving-ware wherever possible. The Clean Water Fund's ReThink Disposables program aids businesses in switching to reusable serving-ware, potentially saving them thousands annually. Their team tailors implementation plans, researches optimal materials, and assists in customer engagement. Prebates for reusable serving-ware are offered on a first-come, first-served basis. For more information, please visit [ReThinkDisposable.org](#).

IT'S THE LAW! FOODWARE ACCESSORIES/CONDIMENTS UPON REQUEST. As of June 1, 2022, Assembly Bill 1276 restricts food establishments with onsite dining and third-party food delivery services from providing single-use food ware accessories or standard condiments unless requested by the consumer. Food establishments with drive-throughs may ask the consumer if they need single-use accessories or standard condiments for food. Single-use food ware accessories include utensils (such as forks, knives, spoons, and sporks), chopsticks, condiment cups and packets, straws, stirrers, splash sticks, and cocktail sticks.

The following food facilities are exempt: Correctional Institutions, Licensed Health Care Facilities, Residential Care Facilities, and Public and Private School Cafeterias. For more information, please visit [bit.ly/CADPH_AB1276](#).

WHEN PURCHASING COMPOSTABLE-WARE

1. Choose 100% Plant-Based Fiber. When choosing to purchase compostable-ware products, choose unbleached and 100% plant-based fiber with NO coating, liner, or filler made from bioplastic, petroleum plastic, or wax. Athens does not accept (for composting or recycling) any form of bioplastic, including PLA and PHA. To ensure the product does not contain PFAS or unacceptable additives, we recommend purchasing plant-based fiber foodware that are certified by BPI, CMA, NSF, and/or TUV OK Compost Industrial.

NOTE: Just because something is labeled as “compostable” does not necessarily mean that the item is acceptable in the organics container for composting.

Non-Acceptable Plant-Based Fibers:

- Textiles are not considered “plant-based fibers”. Do not place rags, clothing, or other cloth/textiles in the organics container for composting.
- Bathroom waste and biosolids, including tissues or bathroom paper towels are NOT acceptable in the organics container for composting.

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2. Bioplastics Are Not Accepted for Composting. Bioplastic is made from biobased (plant or animal matter) polymers, but looks and functions like plastic. Items or containers can be entirely made from bioplastic or contain a bioplastic coating, liner, or filler. Even if “certified compostable,” bioplastics should still be thrown away in the trash.

NOTE: California State law prohibits the marketing of any plastic or bioplastic-like material as “biodegradable, oxo-degradable, or photo-degradable.” Avoid bioplastic products marketed as such. Athens is unable to offer compostability testing for products.

3. Check with Your Suppliers First. In order to save money and time, prior to purchasing single-use disposables, Athens encourages businesses to first check with their suppliers to confirm that the products are 100% fiber-based and do not include in any amount of bioplastic, wax, or petroleum plastic.

WHEN PURCHASING PLASTIC-WARE

1. Choose plastics numbers #1 or #5. Plastic food serving-ware items made from #1 PET or PETE (polyethylene terephthalate), #1 rPET (recycled polyethylene terephthalate), or #5 PP (polypropylene), are more likely to be recycled. The plastic number can be found inside the recycling symbol. Not all plastic numbers have a viable recycling market.



2. Choose plastic items that are white or clear, and avoid black plastic. The darker the color, the harder to recycle. Dark colored plastics are not detectable by Athens’ optical sorters and have lower recycling rates (regardless of resin type).

SINGLE-USE DISPOSABLE PRODUCT RECOMMENDATIONS

Alternatives for the items below are identified in order of compostability and recyclability (based on Athens’ acceptability). Alternative choices have been identified where applicable. When choosing to purchase plant-based fiber or bioplastic products, Athens recommends those certified by BPI, CMA, NSF, and/or TUV OK Compost Industrial.

Bakery, Pastry, and Sandwich Bags – Due to the presence of a grease-barrier, there is currently no product option available that is acceptable in the Athens recycling or organics container. Consider using a 100% paper lunch bag with no liner or coating.

Coffee Cup Sleeves – Unbleached 100% plant-based fiber with NO dyes, stickers, coatings, or laminates. Athens recommends using soy-based ink for printing on sleeves.

Condiment and Sugar Packets – Athens suggests that condiments be dispensed in bulk where possible. Condiment packets (even if paper) are not recyclable. Paper packets are too small and may contain glues not suitable for composting.

Cups (Cold)

1. Made of CLEAR plastic resin #5 PP (polypropylene).
2. Made of #1 PET or PETE (polyethylene terephthalate), or #1 rPET (recycled polyethylene terephthalate).

Cups (Hot)

1. Encourage customers to bring their reusable mugs and offer a cup incentive.
2. Paper cups with a bioplastic coating/liner. (Dispose in trash.)
3. Currently, there is no product option available that is acceptable in the Athens recycling or organics container. Although hot cups with a bioplastic coating/liner should be placed in the trash, “certified compostable” items may be more environmentally friendly.

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SINGLE-USE DISPOSABLE PRODUCT RECOMMENDATIONS

Cup Lids (Cold)

1. Made of CLEAR plastic resin #5 PP (polypropylene).
2. Made of #1 PET or PETE (polyethylene terephthalate), or #1 rPET (recycled polyethylene terephthalate).

Cup Lids (Hot)

1. Made with 100% plant-based fiber material.
2. Made of CLEAR or WHITE plastic resin #5 PP (polypropylene).
3. Made of #1 PET or PETE (polyethylene terephthalate), or #1 rPET (recycled polyethylene terephthalate).

Cutlery

1. Non-coated bamboo, wood, and other 100% plant-based fiber cutlery.
2. Sorting utensils for recycling is very difficult and rarely happens. Athens recommends implementing reusable options and/or limiting free utensils (not combining utensils with take-out orders). Athens also does not recommend utensils that are bioplastic or plastic #6 (polystyrene). If you choose to purchase plastic utensils, choose CLEAR or WHITE plastic #5 (polypropylene) utensils with 100% recycled content. These need to be placed in the trash.

Food-Soiled Paper Products – Athens recommends paper products that are unbleached and made from 100% recycled paper content. 100% plant-based fiber products include, but are not limited to, brown bags, napkins, kitchen paper towels, pizza boxes, and egg cartons that do not contain stickers, plastic-coated advertisements, or other plastic accessories.

Food-soiled paper may be placed in an Athens organics container, if the following applies:

- Must be 100% plant-based fiber with NO coating, liner, or filler made from bioplastic, petroleum plastic, or wax.
- Must be food-soiled ONLY with food and/or drink liquids.

Do NOT place these paper items in an Athens recycling or organics container:

- Paper soiled with cleaning chemicals, hazardous waste, biosolids, animal waste, and/or any non-food related liquids.
- Bathroom waste, including tissues, bathroom paper towels, and personal hygiene products.
- Paper products (like bakery bags, coffee cups, and coffee cup sleeves) with “compostable”, petroleum plastic, or foil insulated liners, coatings, laminates, or windows.

Food Wrappers (such as hot dog and hamburger wrappers) – Due to the presence of a grease-barrier and/or low-foil grade mixed with paper or plastic, there is no product option available that is acceptable in the Athens recycling or organics container. Consider using an acceptable alternative foodware option as indicated in this document.

Paper Bags (known as brown bags or lunch bags) – Unbleached 100% plant-based fiber with NO dyes, stickers, liners, coatings, laminates, or windows made of bioplastic, petroleum plastic, or wax.

Plates – 100% plant-based fiber with no plastic or bioplastic coating.

Small Serving Cups with Lids (known as condiment cups, portion cups, or ramekins)

1. Unbleached 100% plant-based fiber.
2. We do not recommend plastic, as they are too small to be sorted for recycling.

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SINGLE-USE DISPOSABLE PRODUCT RECOMMENDATIONS

Soup Bowl Container

1. Unbleached 100% plant-based fiber.
2. Paper bowls with certified compostable bioplastic coating/liner. (Dispose in trash.)
3. Although hot bowls with a bioplastic coating/liner should be placed in the trash, these certified compostable items may be more environmentally friendly.

Stir Sticks

1. Wood-based stir sticks or edible options like pasta can be composted.
2. Note on plastic: We do not recommend plastic, as they are too small to be sorted for recycling.

Straws

1. 100% paper straws (not coated/lined with bioplastic or wax to prevent degradation).
2. Other plant-based fiber options such as bamboo, paper, pasta, sugar cane, or wood.
3. Certified bioplastic straws (although they should be placed in the trash, these certified compostable items may be more environmentally friendly than petroleum plastic).
4. Note: As of January 2019, Assembly Bill 1884 prohibits full-service restaurants in California from automatically providing single-use plastic straws (derived from either petroleum or bioplastic) to consumers unless requested by the consumer. Full-service restaurants may provide reusable and/or non-plastic straws (bamboo, paper, pasta, sugar cane, wood, etc.) regardless of whether requested by the consumer.

To-Go Clamshells (Cold) (takeout containers)

1. Unbleached 100% plant-based fiber.
2. Made of CLEAR or WHITE plastic resin #5 PP (polypropylene).
3. Made of #1 PET or PETE (polyethylene terephthalate), or #1 rPET (recycled polyethylene terephthalate).

To-Go Clamshells (Hot) (takeout containers)

1. Unbleached 100% plant-based fiber.
2. If plastic version is preferred, utilize CLEAR or WHITE plastic resin #5 PP (polypropylene).
3. Made of #1 PET or PETE (polyethylene terephthalate), or #1 rPET (recycled polyethylene terephthalate).

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